

Ballast Water Control Permit Frequently Asked Questions

Question: Why was the ballast water control legislation passed in 2005?

Answer: The State of Michigan wants to take action to protect our waters from aquatic invasive species.

Question: What problems associated with ballast water discharges will we see in the future if we do not act?

Answer: If actions are not taken to stop the introductions of aquatic invasive species, additional species will be transported into the Great Lakes (and from the Great Lakes to other parts of the world) through ballast water in ocean-going ships. Major impacts such as elimination of native species and increased damage to infrastructure may occur with each new species introduced.

Question: How do I know if my vessel needs a port operations permit from the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality?

Answer: All ocean-going vessels must have a permit from the Department to conduct port operations. You may access the Department's Ballast Water Control permit web site at:
http://www.michigan.gov/deq/0,1607,7-135-3313_3682_3713-153446--,00.html

Question: What are the permit requirements for port operations without ballast water discharges?

Answer: The general permit requires some reporting and notification to the Department 24 hours prior to a port operation. The Port Operations Notification Report form and certification is posted on the Department's web site noted above.

Question: Does a ship need to have a ballast water treatment system on board if no ballast water is discharged in a Michigan port?

Answer: No, only ocean-going ships discharging ballast water in Michigan need to have treatment on board.

Question: How much does the permit cost and how long is it effective?

Answer: There is a \$75 application fee for the certificate of coverage under the general permit and a \$150 annual renewal fee. The certificate of coverage under the general permit is effective for 5 years.

Question: If a ship needs to have treatment installed on board, what are the choices?

Answer: The Department has approved four treatments for the general permit, including sodium hypochlorite, chlorine dioxide, ultraviolet light, and de-oxygenation.

Question: Is there opportunity for an alternative ballast water treatment method to receive approval?

Answer: Yes, oceangoing vessel owners proposing an alternative ballast water treatment method may apply for an individual permit. Individual permit applicants must demonstrate to the Department the alternate treatment method is environmentally sound and its treatment effectiveness is equal to or better than the treatment methods included in the general permit.

Question: What are the penalties for non-compliance with the Ballast Water Control General Permit?

Answer: The penalties are the same as for violation of any state surface water discharge permit, up to \$25,000 per day.

Question: What is ballast water?

Answer: Ballast water is carried in tanks on ships for stability when lightly loaded or unloaded. Ballast water is pumped into the tanks when an empty ship starts a journey and pumped out when it takes on cargo at its destination.

Question: Why are Aquatic Invasive Species a problem in ballast water?

Answer: Ships can take on ballast water in areas with water pollution or in areas where fish and plants are numerous. The water is not filtered or treated. When a ship discharges the ballast water, any pollutants, fish, or plants that survived the trip are released into the new location. If the new location is favorable, the organisms, including bacteria, fish, plants, or viruses can grow very large populations because their natural predators and diseases are absent. Aquatic invasive species cause major changes in ecosystems and cost Michigan residents millions of dollars per year to control.

Question: What are some examples of species introduced in ballast water?

Answer: Zebra mussels (well known threat to infrastructure by clogging intake pipes and beaches), Round goby (fish that competes with desirable native species), Spiny water flea (inedible zooplankton that disrupts the bottom of the food web), Ruffe (fish that competes with desirable native species) and others.

Question: What else is being done to protect Michigan waters?

Answer: The following efforts are currently underway:

The National Invasive Species Act requires ships entering the Great Lakes from the St. Lawrence Seaway to have exchanged their ballast water with salt water in the ocean. This reduces the number and survivability of organisms in the tanks. Some ships come in fully loaded with no ballast on board, so they do not have to do the ballast exchange. However, some unpumpable material still remains in the tanks that can contain organisms.

The St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation and the St. Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation have incorporated basic ballast water management practices into the Practices and Procedures as a condition of passage for the St. Lawrence Seaway. These practices include recommendations such as not ballasting in areas of known pollution, etc.

Question: Where can I look for additional information on Aquatic Invasive Species?

Answer: The following web sites include additional information.

www.miseagrant.umich.edu/ais/index.html

www.great-lakes.net/envt/flora-fauna/invasive/invasive.html

www.deq.state.mi.us/documents/deq-water-npdes-ballast-SenateBill_332.pdf

www.michigan.gov/deq/0,1607,7-135-3313_3677_8314---,00.html